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ABSTRACT

This document takes the information provided in another report, "Electronic Collaboration: A Practical Guide for Educators," produced by the National School Network, and adapts it for community colleges. It addresses the issue of the extent to which community college teachers are actively involved in online education, and how they can become knowledgeable enough to understand and tackle the many varieties and implications of this new trend. An "eleven-step process" is presented for implementing an online collaborative project; each step is followed by examples from two school-based collaborations. The eleven steps are: (1) determine goals by asking people who will be involved in the project what they wish to accomplish; (2) decide when to begin the project and the guidelines for communicating; (3) decide how teachers will be compensated for the extra time required for the project; (4) be an advocate for the online conference; (5) prepare a preliminary action plan and proposal that details what is being studied; (6) establish the hardware and software requirements for the environment; (7) identify the individuals to join the projects; (8) select the participants and the moderator(s); (9) prepare for the first group encounter; (10) begin the discussions; and (11) have the new community of learners evaluate the project work. The paper concludes by advising readers to examine the original report. (VWC)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND ONLINE EDUCATION

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We all know that online education is a particularly hot issue at this time, K through post-doctoral studies. Many Community Colleges have already begun to adjust to the new trend. In fact, some of them, as is frequently the case in higher education, are indeed leaders of the movement nationwide.

However, many decisions have been made by administrators. But what of Community College teachers? Have they been included? How can they become enough of an expert, or at least comfortable enough, to understand and tackle the many varieties and implications of online education?

First, they must be intellectually curious and adventuresome. One is bound to be a bit apprehensive and that is natural. A good first step may be to realize that electronic education is neither a panacea nor is it magic. It's just another tool that if properly implemented can help teachers teach and students learn.

Simple, practical guidelines have been developed. There is no need to be intimidated. Cautious and careful, yes, but not intimidated.

Secondly, Community Colleges must know and realize that the electronic-education train has indeed left the station. We really can't

stop it. We can either jump on board and try to guide it to benefit our students or we can do nothing and be run over.

Third, since electronic education is now more than a fad and since more and more colleges, both proprietary and public ones, are becoming involved it behooves Community Colleges teachers -- not just administrators -- to accept reality and become knowledgeable. To understand and dive that locomotive.

There is a plethora of material. Unfortunately much of it is tied to a particular provider who wants to sell you their methods and material. That's not a sin, of course, but one should at least be informed and knowledgeable so one can pick or devise what is best for one's particular Community College.

Department of Education Publication

Luckily a new non-commercial and non-biased guide has been developed by the federal government. Factual and written in plain English it will, we suspect, become a trusted manual at many educational institutions throughout the nation.

In brief it includes:

* explanations of various kinds of online collaborations -- discussion groups, data collection and organization, document sharing, synchronous communication, and online workshops and courses

* tools and websites that can be resources for creating each of these forms of collaborative environments

- tips for "moderating" online collaborations.

Electronic Collaboration

"Electronic Collaboration: A Practical Guide for Educators" features an 11-step process for making online collaborative projects successful. Although it is not Community College specific, its data is relevant and can be adapted to Community College needs.

Examples of online educational collaborations are highlighted throughout the guide. It is the product of research and planning by several "think tanks." Together with the Department of Education it was produced by the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, the National School Network, and the Teacher Enhancement Electronic Community Hall.

By way of introducing the publication we will concentrate on the "Implementing the Project" section of the chapter, "It's Your Turn: Designing and Implementing a Collaborative Environment." Geared to the classroom teacher it can be of particular benefit to Community College teachers.

We present below an "eleven-step process" for implementing an online collaborative project. Each step is followed by examples from two school-based collaborations. (These examples appear in the full publication.)

First think about the components of your particular Community College environment. Once you have a good understanding of what already exists, ask yourself the following questions. What are you trying to accomplish? Be as specific as possible and start small -- to achieve success and build confidence for larger projects.

Then figure out what do you need? Once again be specific. To achieve those goals try step-by-step approach listed below. But remain flexible. Adapt it to suit your Community College purposes and needs.
The goals of each individual project will determine what works best.

Eleven Key Steps

1. Determine goals.

Ask the people who will be involved in the project, such as Community College administrators, curriculum coordinators, and lead teachers, what they want to accomplish. They may not be sure of what goals they want to achieve, so discuss their needs and help them refine their plan.

2. Decide when you want to begin the project and the guidelines for communicating.

A first meeting should be face-to-face. Some participants may need to feel the sense of recognition that this can elicit. It's a way to build trust and a relationship from the beginning. Subsequent meetings could and probably should be conducted online.

3. Decide how teachers will be compensated for their extra time.

To get this project off on a good footing, this must be addressed. It's only fair. Any administrator who attends will be paid, be "on the clock." Why not teachers?

If the collaborations take place during school hours, find out whether teachers will have classroom coverage. If it is a summer project, find out if they are eligible for stipends. Investigate whether they can receive professional development credits through their Community College system or local university. This can be a major selling point, so make sure you have these answers before approaching teachers.

4. Advocate strongly for your online conference.

This is where you need to frame your mission carefully. Try to anticipate the reaction to your request of administrators or others whose support you will need.

For example, are they willing to fund the purchase of new hardware or software? Will they authorize release time for participants? Will they help recruit participants? Be prepared to meet negative responses with examples of successful collaborations by other groups.

5. Prepare a preliminary action plan/proposal that details what you are studying and when.

This is your chance to articulate your goals and lay out an initial timeline with specific benchmarks. The proposal can serve as a starting point for discussions.

6. Establish what hardware and software are available, and think about the features you want your environment to have.

When planning a collaborative environment, it's probably safe to assume that users do not all have the same software and will have to acquire it, unless your group members all have access to similar hardware, software, and technical support. Think in terms of the existing infrastructure and its implications for choosing a computing environment....

* Do users have access to the Web, or only email?...
* What kind of computer access do participants have?...
* Does everyone have similar hardware and computing power?...

Keep in mind that you may not have a choice at all. It's possible that your hardware can only support certain software programs, or your Community College may already be using a specific type of groupware.

7. Identify those you want to join the project and how you are going to invite participants.

You might decide to solicit volunteers either through email or word of mouth. If you want participants who are already comfortable with Internet technology, it may be a good strategy to post an announcement to a mailing list server or on a Web site are good choices.

How can one find an appropriate mailing list server? First check Indexed lists of newsgroups and mailing lists such as Reference.com –

http://www.reference.com/ -- or the List of Lists.
http://catalog.com/vivian/interest-group-search.html

You might also consider approaching your president directly. Once convinced of the merits of your proposal, she or he may be willing to promote your project at Board and other policy making meetings.

Still another option is to send an invitation via the regular mail or in a teachers' newsletter; make sure you send a copy to other potential supporters such as the president, deans, department chairs, the librarian and perhaps even the local superintendent of schools. Start to build a network

In the invitation, be specific about your goals. Let potential participants know how much time out of the classroom this could

require and mention classroom coverage and/or stipends if they are relevant. Provide enough details to make the project understandable, but let them know it will be an evolving, fluid experience. Also, select a date for the kick-off meeting.

Do you want to have an application process or will you include all volunteers? If it's a competitive process, provide information about both the application process and your methods for choosing participants.

Decide whether you want to bring in outside professionals. They can provide respectability and useful knowledge. If so, who are they? Check with the American Association of Community Colleges and other national organizations for suggestions. Community Colleges who have already been down the electronic education path are rich sources for competent consultants.

Pick your consultants very carefully. Make sure they do not have a hidden agenda and that they will recommend what is best for your particular Community College.

Do not overlook local talent. Consider having a computer teacher be part of the conference, so you have built-in help for any technical glitches that may occur. Be sure this expert is aware that you may be asking for technical assistance as problems arise.

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8. Select the participants and the moderator(s).

Consider the number of people who can participate while keeping the work manageable and the feeling personal. Depending on the group's experience with Internet technology, you may want to use more than one moderator -- one for content issues and one for technical support.

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9. Prepare for the first group encounter.

Arrange for participants to come together for an initial meeting. Like any other first encounter at a teachers' seminar, participants should introduce themselves, explain why they are interested in working on the project, what their expectations are, and what they think they can contribute and learn.

Make sure you have a skilled moderator who can help you conduct the meeting. (See the next section on being an effective moderator.) Review the preliminary proposal with the group and make sure it is on target, or at least within range. Discuss changes that need to be made.

Make sure everyone is still on board. Does the project need to be substantively revamped or can the work begin? Before you close the meeting, define the next step, whether it be overhauling the plan or convening online to begin the collaboration.

10. Let the discussions begin!

The moderator can take the lead in raising questions, posing scenarios, and offering suggestions for strategies and activities. The moderator will be more effective if there is an agenda and he sticks to it. Once participants get comfortable with the technology and its many opportunities, they will likely take a more active role in shaping the discussion.

11. Now that you have a new community of learners, make sure they help you evaluate the project work.

Evaluation should be an ongoing process to which all participants contribute. The group's moderator can help guide this process by regularly asking the group about their progress.

Community Colleges

Once again this new report is not Community College specific. But the rules and guidelines are written for educational institutions and can be easily adapted to Community Colleges. We have done so in this short introductory report.

We urge you to read the entire report which is available online at:

http://www.lab.brown.edu/public/ocsc/collaboration.guide/

Single copies can also be secured free of charge by calling the LAB Publications Department at (401) 274-9548, extension 782, or can be ordered online:

http://www.lab.brown.edu/public/pubs/pubs_order.shtml

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Both Mellanders have a long history of teaching and serving as administrators at a number of Community Colleges nationwide.

Mr. Mellander was president of Passaic County Community College in New Jersey for ten years. He was also appointed by the governor of New Jersey to serve on the State Board of Education.

Later he returned to his native California to serve as president of Mission College in California.

Later he was selected to be the chancellor of the 35,000 student West Valley-Mission Community College District in California. A position he held for seven years before returning to the Washington, D. C. region.

Since 1992 he has been the Director of The National Center for Community College Education at George Mason University. He is the co-author of The Community College Presidency: Current Status and Future Outlook (1994).

In 1994 the Mellanders were commissioned to prepare a Community College Master Plan for the Republic of Hungary. It has been partially implemented and has been studied by other European countries.

Presently they both serve as consultants to various community colleges and universities and school districts.

They have recently completed a book, Charles Edward Magoon: The Panama Years which will be published in November1999.

They also write frequently for The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education and have on-going research projects in Puerto Rico and Panama. They are presently working on a manuscript tentatively entitled "Community Colleges and Hispanics."

They both teach at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

END